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SUBJECT: Media Coverage of A/S Campbell Visit to Burma

Summary

11. (SBU) State-controlled and privately-owned media largely provided fairly dry and straightforward accounts of EAP A/S Campbell's two-day visit to Nay Pyi Taw and Rangoon, November 3-4, though a state newspaper did report that A/S Campbell met at the Charge's residence in Rangoon with individuals "who are still being scrutinized" but did not meet with leaders of a regime-linked political party. Two privately owned weekly newspapers published pictures of Campbell with Aung San Suu Kyi the day after their meeting, an unusually quick turnaround. Normally censor board approval takes much longer. A large number of media attended the photo opportunities before and after the meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, the first occasion in seven years for the media to film her openly. End summary.

State Media Coverage

12. (SBU) No news appeared overnight after Campbell's initial meetings with Burmese government officials on November 3 in the capital of Nay Pyi Taw. Instead, state run MRTV news focused attention on Senior General Than Shwe's visit to the Cyclone Nargis-affected Delta region. After A/S Campbell's second day of meetings in Nay Pyi Taw and Rangoon, MRTV broadcasted images of the meeting with Prime Minister Thein Sein and the Embassy-arranged meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi at a Rangoon hotel. Commentary was simply that the meetings took place. The government mouthpiece New Light of Myanmar published pictures in its November 5 edition only of Campbell's meeting with the Prime Minister. When PAO asked the New Light chief editor why there was no picture of the Aung San Suu Kyi meeting, the reply was, "There was no space." MRTV concluded its coverage of the visit by showing a short clip of A/S Campbell's statement at the airport prior to departure.

13. (SBU) Thus far there have been no trip-related editorials in the New Light -- commonly the means by which the government offers its perspective on issues. However, an otherwise dry November 6 New Light press article citing A/S Campbell's Rangoon meetings with the National League for Democracy and press conference included the following swipe: "Although arrangements have been made for Mr. Kurt Michael Campbell to meet with CEC [Central Executive Committee] members of [the pro-regime] National Unity Party at its headquarters and representatives of the remaining officially registered political parties at the hotel where he put up, he did not meet them. Instead, he separately met some persons who are still being scrutinized at the residence of charge d'affaires of US embassy on their own arrangement."

14. (SBU) Comment: The Embassy declined to provide the names of Rangoon interlocutors to the GOB, though we understand authorities later took in for questioning at least one ethnic leader who attended lunch with Campbell. Regarding the NUP, Post made clear to the GOB Campbell's willingness to meet with that party's leaders in Nay Pyi Taw, but also made clear the Rangoon schedule was too crowded. The Charge later met with NUP leaders to explain exactly what happened.

Limited Private Media Coverage So Far

15. (SBU) The privately owned weekly newspapers Weekly Eleven (in a special supplement) and the Myanmar Times, which both publish on Thursdays, included pictures of Campbell and Aung San Suu Kyi, as well as pictures of Campbell shaking hands with Thein Sein in their November 5 editions. (Note: Privately owned newspapers in Burma cannot publish dailies.) Accompanying stories reported that the meetings took place as part of the delegation's fact finding mission to Burma. Two that publish on Friday -- Snapshot and The Modern Weekly -- ran similar photos. We expect other private weeklies will follow. Radio Free Asia reported that authorities allowed the weeklies to print pictures of Campbell with Aung San Suu Kyi only if they printed pictures of Campbell with Thein Sein simultaneously. As no private media were invited to the meetings in Nay Pyi Taw, the media had to get those photos from the Ministry of Information. The next-day articles by Myanmar Times and Weekly Eleven were the result of surprisingly quick approval by the Press Scrutiny and Registration Board. Usually the censors take at least a couple of days, often a week or more, to review articles and photographs.

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16. (SBU) The press had occasional chances to photograph Aung San Suu Kyi during her trial last summer, but always under controlled conditions dictated by prison authorities. The media welcomed the open photo opportunity offered by the Embassy, and an enthusiastic crowd of roughly 40 journalists waited to photograph and film "the lady" when she arrived to meet with A/S Campbell and delegation. They then happily waited two hours to film her departure. Several journalists thanked Public Affairs staff for providing the first opportunity in seven years to film Aung San Suu Kyi in an open setting.

Dinger